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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000157

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR THASKIN MUTED IN CHIANG MAI FOLLOWING COUP

REF: A) BANGKOK SEPTELS B) CHIANG MAI 120 (THIRD ARMY COMMANDER CHALLENGES THAKSIN'S NORTHERN POWER BASE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Beatrice Camp , Consul General, Consulate Chiang  
Mai, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Although well known as a Thai Rak Thai (TRT) stronghold and home town of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Chiang Mai showed no signs of unrest following the late-Tuesday military takeover of the government in Bangkok by a group calling itself the Council for Democratic Reform under the Constitutional Monarchy (see Embassy Bangkok reporting). Support for Thaksin has not been in evidence, as powerful political allies and relatives in his northern Thailand home base scattered or kept a low profile, while the majority that supported him in previous elections now seems largely sympathetic, or at least tolerant, toward the military takeover. Meanwhile, armored vehicles stationed near the Consulate General appear to be positioned to control access to municipal offices located across the street rather than to protect the safety of the consulate, as was reported by some media and Third Army sources. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Despite the declaration of martial law by the military-run Council for Democratic Reform under the Constitutional Monarchy, Chiang Mai residents awoke to calm this morning. Troops, tanks, and armored personnel carriers (APCs) were stationed at some intersections and government buildings - including municipal offices across from the consulate - but for the most part business carried on as usual. While government offices, banks, and most schools closed in accordance with the announcement of a national holiday, most shops remained open with the notable exception of some Shinawatra family-owned businesses in Thaksin's home town of San Kamphaeng, just east of Chiang Mai. Military units were also placed near Thaksin's Green Valley estate in the Chiang Mai suburb of Mae Rim, located north of the central city. There were no reported gatherings or incidents, for or against, at any area Shinawatra businesses or homes.

3. (C) Not unexpectedly, Third Army Commander Lt. Gen. Saprang Kalayanamitr, was reportedly in Bangkok as a committed participant in the coup. Long at odds with Thaksin, Saprang, the top military official in the north, drew significant attention in recent months due to his vocal and very public opposition to the prime minister. (ref b)

4. (C) Many Thaksin loyalists in politically powerful positions remain unaccounted for, have left the city, or are avoiding any visible moves at this time. While a weary-looking Chiang Mai Gov. Suwat Tantipat and Mayor Boonlert Buranupakorn complied with orders to present themselves to 33rd Military Circle Commander Supa-Aksorn at the Kawila army base in Chiang Mai, MP Pakorn Buranupakorn and Thaksin's brother MP Payap Shinawatra are said to have left the city. Thaksin's wife Khunying Pojaman Shinawatra reportedly left Thailand for Singapore moments before the coup along with Thaksin's sister, Yaowapa Wongsawat, who herself was an MP from Chiang Mai and influential TRT leader.

5. (C) A little after 5 a.m. today, four M113 APCs with at least 40 soldiers arrived in the area of the consulate. Two APCs took up positions on the road separating the consulate and the Chiang Mai municipal offices, just a few feet from the north gate entrance to the consulate. Two other APCs moved into position around the corner between the municipal office building and the Ping River. Soldiers were relaxed and did not interfere with traffic in and out of the consulate or the daily outdoor

produce market that operates in the narrow alleys near the municipal headquarters. A Third Army source told the consulate that the units were deployed to protect the safety of the consulate, an explanation later repeated on some media broadcasts. (COMMENT: We believe the units were instead sent to control access to the municipal offices, controlled by Thaksin ally Mayor Boonlert. No similar "protection" was in place near the Chinese or Japanese consulates in other areas of the city and some of the APCs had moved to block the gates of the municipal office parking lot by mid morning. END COMMENT). Calls to the municipal office went unanswered Wednesday.

16. (C) Chiang Mai and other northern areas have always been dependable sources of moral support and votes for Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai party. Most northerners continued to back their hometown boy throughout the recent political crisis and annulment of the April elections. Moreover, the few anti-Thaksin northerners - mostly academics and other elites - were unable to or prevented from organizing effective grassroots displays of opposition. Yet on the day following the coup, Chiang Mai residents showed no signs of opposing the military takeover or resenting the military forces occupying busy intersections and other strategic locations. Indeed, many people passing through the market near the consulate offered refreshments and snacks to the soldiers stationed there.

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17. (C) COMMENT: The speed and effective coordination of Tuesday night's coup appear to have prevented any organized pro-Thaksin movement in and around Chiang Mai from getting off the ground. Although he was deeply popular here in his home base, Thaksin's political strength relied on a top-down organization of politicians, TRT organizers, and other quasi-political heavyweights. Despite overwhelming support from farmers, middle class workers, and other rural populations in elections, almost no NGOs or civic groups not tied into the TRT political structure exist in Northern Thailand that could represent or mobilize these potential supporters. With influential Thaksin loyalists dispersed or scattered and martial law supposedly banning groups of five or more from gathering in public areas, it seems unlikely that there will be any significant displays of civic opposition to the coup. And while they supported Thaksin with their votes, northern Thais - like many Thais - may view Thaksin's forced removal from politics as an acceptable path out of the recent tensions if it leads to a return of calm and stability, something that even Thaksin's most loyal supporters here would admit did not seem likely with him staying in power. END COMMENT.  
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